

Herbs and spices

General Information

Imports of herbs and spices from countries outside the European Union (EU) must meet the same or equivalent food hygiene and compositional standards and procedures as food produced in the UK or other EU Member States. You do not normally need a health certificate to import herbs and spices.

Standards for spices

UK law does not define standards for spices. However, advice from the Health Protection Agency (HPA) on 'end product' microbiological criteria may be helpful. The HPA is an independent body that protects the health and wellbeing of everyone in England and Wales. More information on these criteria can be found at www.hpa.org.uk

Information on UK standards for spices is also available from the Seasoning and Spice Association (SSA). The SSA website can be found at www.seasoningandspice.org.uk

Food colourings, flavourings and sweeteners

Some herbs and spices may contain colourings, flavourings or sweeteners. Although these may be approved by the food authority in the country of origin, some of them may not be approved in the EU. For information on food flavourings, sweeteners, colourings and preservatives, please contact the Agency's Food Additives team on 020 7276 8570 or by email at foodadditives@foodstandards.gsi.gov.uk

Labelling

For general information on labelling requirements for food, please contact the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) Helpline on 0845 933 5577 or by email at defra.helpline@defra.gsi.gov.uk. You will need to specify that you wish to be put through to the labelling department.

For advice on the labelling of specific products, please contact your local authority's Trading Standards Department or Environmental Health Department, or that of your UK distributor. You can find the contact details of your local Trading Standards Office by either visiting www.tradingstandards.gov.uk/advice/consumer-advice.cfm and typing in your postcode or contacting your local authority directly.

Organics

If you are importing organic products (live or unprocessed agricultural products, processed agricultural for use as food or feed and vegetative propagating material and seeds for cultivation), from outside the EU, please contact the Organic Imports team at DEFRA at organic.imports@defra.gsi.gov.uk. For information on organic regulation and standards, (including labelling) within the UK please contact the Organic Strategy team at organic.standards@defra.gsi.gov.uk

Packaging

Food contact materials and articles, including those used for food packaging, are controlled by a comprehensive EU harmonised legislation that has been fully implemented in the UK. This legislation is particularly thorough in its control of plastic materials and articles intended for food use. For information on the safety of packaging please contact Vincent Greenwood on 020 7276 8548 or by email at vincent.greenwood@foodstandards.gsi.gov.uk

Food hygiene

For general enquiries on food hygiene please contact David Gray on 020 7276 8940 or by email at david.gray@foodstandards.gsi.gov.uk

Pesticides

For information on pesticides safety levels for imports please contact Health and Safety Executive's (HSE) Chemicals Regulation Directorate (CRD) by accessing the link: <http://www.pesticides.gov.uk/>

Contaminants

A guidance note on the Contaminants in Food (England) Regulations 2009, which make provision for enactment and enforcement of Commission Regulations setting regulatory limits for contaminants in food (nitrate, mycotoxins, metals, 3-MCPD dioxins and PAHs), can be found at <http://www.food.gov.uk/foodindustry/guidancenotes/foodguid/guidancefoodcontams09>

Food imported into the UK also has to meet the requirements of The Arsenic in Food Regulations 1959. For more information on these regulations please contact Gavin Shears on 020 7276 8713 or by email gavin.shears@foodstandards.gsi.gov.uk

Import Restrictions*

There are some other import restrictions/requirements that can apply to herbs and spices of which importers need to be aware.

“Higher-Risk” Products

As of 25 January 2010 imports of certain feed and food of non-animal origin that are considered to be “higher-risk” can only enter the UK through specific ports and airports which are designated points of entry (DPEs) where official controls will be carried out. A “higher-risk” product is feed or food that is either known to be, or is an emerging risk, to public health. Further information for business operators can be found at

http://www.food.gov.uk/foodindustry/imports/banned_restricted/highrisknonpoao

Kava-kava

Since 9 January 2003 the herb Kava-kava, and any food containing it, is banned from entry to the UK. This is because of concerns regarding its toxic effect on the liver. For further information please contact Stephen Knight (stephen.knight@dh.gsi.gov.uk) or Dr Trudy Netherwood (trudy.netherwood@dh.gsi.gov.uk) at the Department of Health.

Imports of feed and food from Japan

As of 27 March 2011 imports of all feed and food originating in or consigned from Japan to the EU are subject to special conditions. This is following the accident at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant in Japan in March 2011. This will mean that consignments of feed and food can only enter the UK through specific ports and airports where official controls will be carried out. Further information for business operators can be found at:

http://www.food.gov.uk/foodindustry/imports/banned_restricted/japan

* For a complete list of foods (not of animal origin) with current EU restrictions, please see the following link on the Agency’s website:

www.food.gov.uk/foodindustry/imports/banned_restricted/restricted_foodstuffs

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Email: imported.food@foodstandards.gsi.gov.uk

Helpline: 020 7276 8018

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